A LETTER

TO THE

RIGHT HON. THE SECRETARY OF STATE

FOR

THE HOME DEPARTMENT,

CONTAINING

REMARKS ON THE REPORT

OF THE

SELECT COMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

ON ANATOMY,

AND POINTING OUT THE MEANS BY WHICH THE SCIENCE MAY BE CULTIVATED WITH ADVANTAGE AND SAFETY TO THE PUBLIC.

BY G. J. GUTHRIE, F.R.S.

PROFESSOR OF ANATOMY AND SURGERY TO THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS; SURGEON TO THE WESTMINSTER HOSPITAL, AND TO THE ROYAL WESTMINSTER OPHTHALMIC HOSPITAL, &c. &c. &c.

LONDON:

W. SAMS, ROYAL LIBRARY, ST. JAMES'S STREET.

1829.

Price One Shilling.

A LETTER

TO THE

RIGHT HON. THE SECRETARY OF STATE

FOR

THE HOME DEPARTMENT.

It is not my intention to argue those points which the select Committee of the House of Commons on Anatomy have noticed, and in my judgment estimated rightly; but only to inquire into others, which may possibly be erroneous, as resulting from the examination of medical men. The Report of the Committee will, in all probability, be followed by some legislative enactments; and it is desirable, that these should be formed after the most mature consideration of the subject.

The absolute necessity for legislative interference of some kind, seems to be admitted by all parties. It is required in a moral and political point of view, not only as a safeguard to the public, but as an act of justice to the medical profession; which, from the construction the law has latterly received, ought not to be delayed.

It is agreed, that the study of anatomy, by profes-

LONDON:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM BULMER AND CO. CLEVELAND-ROW, ST. JAMES'S.

A LETTER

TO THE

RIGHT HON. THE SECRETARY OF STATE

FOR

THE HOME DEPARTMENT.

It is not my intention to argue those points which the select Committee of the House of Commons on Anatomy have noticed, and in my judgment estimated rightly; but only to inquire into others, which may possibly be erroneous, as resulting from the examination of medical men. The Report of the Committee will, in all probability, be followed by some legislative enactments; and it is desirable, that these should be formed after the most mature consideration of the subject.

The absolute necessity for legislative interference of some kind, seems to be admitted by all parties. It is required in a moral and political point of view, not only as a safeguard to the public, but as an act of justice to the medical profession; which, from the construction the law has latterly received, ought not to be delayed.

It is agreed, that the study of anatomy, by professional persons, is indispensably necessary for the

comfort and well being of mankind—that it is of more importance to the poor than to the rich, that the junior and inferior classes of medical practitioners should be, at least, tolerably conversant in anatomy. The rich can at all times command the best assistance; while the poor (such is the constitution of society) must take that which is offered to them. This statement, though subject to many exceptions, may be received as generally true; and if it be received, it is clearly incumbent on the rich and the powerful to take care that no act of theirs shall limit the extension of that information, which it is admitted all medical men ought to possess. Yet it is owing to their acts, in one capacity or another, that the diffusion of anatomical knowledge is prevented. The senator makes laws, under which punishments are inflicted upon surgeons found dissecting, or even having dead bodies in their possession. The judge, who causes these punishments to be carried into execution with the greatest severity (for the charge of the judge to the jury is generally decisive of the nature of the verdict), does not hesitate to recommend to another jury in a civil action, to give ample damages against any surgeon who may have been found deficient in that same anatomical knowledge, which he had, in a criminal court, previously punished him for trying to acquire; so that the same laws may be said to prohibit the acquisition of knowledge, and to punish a man for

not possessing it. The jury who awarded damages against a surgeon on account of his ignorance of anatomy, will, in their several other capacities of churchwardens, overseers of the poor, and governors of hospitals, immediately walk to their respective parishes, poor-houses, and hospitals; and take all possible pains to prevent, perhaps, the very same man from obtaining that knowledge (which is only to be gained by dissection), and which they have just punished him, and would punish him again, for not having acquired. They will even expend large sums (although committed to their charge for other purposes) in the burial of persons who have no friends, rather than suffer the surgeon, or his pupils, to take them for dissection. This is said to arise from a prejudice against dissection, and from respect for the dead; but, it is really not the fact; few people have any prejudice on the subject; very few, indeed, care any thing about the matter, when their own family or friends are not concerned. It arises from the petty authority which these persons discover they can exercise over the surgeon, and frequently from a sort of envy of the superior station his attainments give him in society. A difficulty on these points rarely if ever occurs with a body of men who have been well educated, and live in the higher ranks of life. They are always willing to yield in favour of science; they only require that what is done, shall be done as decently and respectfully as circumstances will

admit. The man who opposes the decent dissection of the body of a person who has no friends, and who is to be buried at the public expense, will generally be found to be a person without education, and who late in life finds himself clothed with a little brief authority, which he never expected to possess. Such a person will say, if the doctors want dissection, why do not they leave their own bodies for that purpose? apparently, quite unaware that it is the personal interest of every medical man, who possesses a certain degree of knowledge and reputation, to keep all others in ignorance. The greater the number of well-educated surgeons, the less will be the profit accruing to each. The desire manifested by the ablest and most valued physicians and surgeons of the present day, for the encouragement of anatomical science, is a strong instance of the disinterestedness of the profession.

The introduction of the cow-pox deprived almost every physician and surgeon of half his practice; the loss which each individual suffered was not for a moment considered; and their own personal interest yielded to the comfort and happiness of their fellow-creatures. The general diffusion of anatomical knowledge will have a similar, if not a greater effect, on the income of the profession; the same sum will, in fact, be divided among a greater number of persons: it may, indeed, be less, as the competition becomes greater; for there are

many people in this great town, who will bargain for their lives, as they would for their shoes; and when they ask "how much" they have, or will have to pay for an operation, or a long attendance, mean to imply by that, "how little." If a surgeon performs an operation for a poor man, by which his life is saved, or he is relieved from excruciating agony, or restored to sight; who is the person benefited? If it be necessary at a subsequent period, that a body be dissected, in order to enable another surgeon to perform a similar operation on another person; and there were only two bodies to be obtained, those of the patient who had been relieved, and of the surgeon who relieved him—whose body ought to be dissected? Is there a reasonable man in England will say the body of the surgeon? Suppose the patient has given the surgeon five hundred or a thousand guineas—does it alter the matter? He has acquitted himself of a debt of gratitude towards his surgeon; but has he acquitted himself towards his Maker—towards mankind at large? I answer, that he has not done it; and if a body must be dissected, in order that similar benefits be conferred by others on the rest of mankind, the body of the man who has been relieved, is the first on which the public has a claim.

This leads us to inquire, whether the objection to, or prejudice against dissection, has been personal, as regards the individual, or is dependent on

the feelings of the friends who survive. There can be no doubt that it arises from both causes, although the latter preponderates in a very marked manner. Few individuals really care much what becomes of their bodies after they are dead; they have lived as other persons have done, and they wish to be buried, or disposed of, according to the custom of their country. It is the last sad duty of their friends to attend their remains; and it is considered either as a want of regard, or of respect for the dead, when it is not done in the usual manner. When a person is dissected without Christian burial, or exhumated afterwards, it is the feelings of the surviving friends which are injured; it is their rights which are outraged, and they resent it accordingly. Many individuals, and medical men in particular, would devote their bodies to dissection, if it were not that they do not wish to distress those whom they leave behind them. It has been said, that dissection is objected to because murderers are dissected; but of the truth of this supposition I entertain great doubt: indeed, there does not appear to be the slightest foundation for the assertion. When the examination of a body, whether of the rich or of the poor, is solicited by a physician, when did he receive a refusal, on the ground that murderers only were opened?—Never. Such a thing never entered into the imagination of any one. It is declined always on the score of the feelings of the living being adverse to such a pro-

ceeding, principally from delicacy, partly from prejudice, but in no case arising from the stigma attached by law to dissection. When permission is given to open a body, it is often accompanied with the express condition, that no part whatever shall be taken away, in order to be preserved in the museum of the anatomist. It is the feeling which dictates this request, that operates against the complete dissection of a body. If a relative or friend submits to have the body of his relation or friend examined, as a debt due to mankind; and in order to facilitate the means of obtaining information, by which the sufferings of others may be mitigated or removed, he sacrifices his feelings only for a moment; but if he were to yield a beloved mother, wife, or sister, for complete dissection, he has, in the first place, to conquer the feeling of the indelicacy of the proceeding; and, secondly, the horror of afterwards hearing, that various parts of the person he most esteemed and loved, are exposed in bottles, for the contemplation of the learned, and the gaze of the curious. It has been proved that where dissecting establishments have been attached to hospitals, they have not had the slightest influence in diminishing the number of applications for admission; although it is the common opinion of the poor, that all who die without friends are regularly dissected in them. They place no reliance on the form of burial they see going on; they do not believe the body is

actually buried in the coffin, which goes to the churchyard; still they are not deterred from seeking admission into hospitals; they care very little about the matter. I have, at this moment, a patient in the Westminster hospital, whose life I have saved more than once within the last two years. He has lately lost an arm, and the operation was followed by an attack of inflammation on the chest. In explaining the case to the students, I said, "this man would long since have been dead, if his operation had been performed twenty years ago; he has been saved by the knowledge acquired during this period, in the dissection of similar cases." To the man himself, I said, half in jest (in order to try what effect it would have upon him, and the others in the ward), "I certainly will have a skeleton made of you if you die, that you also may be of use to others." His reply was, "if *you* do not, I dare say somebody else will, and I had rather you than any body." He said this, laughing loudly, in which he was accompanied by every other patient in the ward. If he were to die, it would be a matter of perfect indifference to them what became of him.

The doors of every dissecting room in London are always open, there is nobody to watch them, they swing backwards and forwards on a pulley and weight, that they may shut of themselves, in case any body leaves them open; every man may walk in and walk out whenever he pleases;

many persons do, but no one gives himself any concern about what is going on. The neighbours care nothing about it, and unless, from some accident, the place becomes offensive, no one interferes; although the resurrection men, for their own purposes, sometimes endeavour to excite a little commotion. In fact, the public care nothing about it, and the dissection of dead bodies requires only the support of the law, and proper regulations, to become as accessible a study in London as in any other part of Europe.

I have already said, the dissection of murderers does not give rise to a feeling adverse to the pursuit; I conceive it to be a mere fancy on the part of some medical men, who maintain this opinion. The bodies of these persons were first given over for dissection, for the public good, at a period when such operations were considered to be inconsistent with religious feeling, or the rites of the church. In a similar manner, previously to the Christian era, criminals condemned to death were, in Egypt, given up alive for dissection; and it is believed that Erasistratus and Herophilus did perform their dissections on living men, they themselves not being surgeons, but philosophers. In the discoveries which might be made, and were indeed then made, by such proceedings, the public good alone seems to have been consulted. When humanity forbade this legal dissection of living men, it suggested the offer made to criminals condemned

to death, of undergoing certain operations and experiments not necessarily destructive of life; which if they submitted to, and survived, they would escape the sentence of the law, and be pardoned. This practice proves, satisfactorily, that the advantage of the public was the object in view; and the same object in this very form has been advanced by a continuation of the practice nearly to our own time. When certain peculiarities of religious belief militated against the dissection of dead bodies, and the performance of surgical operations, as was the case amongst the Saracens, as well as afterwards among ourselves, some care was yet taken of the public interest, and the bodies of those who were supposed to have died without the pale of the church, were given over to dissection, not as a punishment, but because they were almost the only bodies which could, in a religious point of view, be so disposed of. Public good was the object then in view, the public advantage is the same great object now; only it requires to be accompanied by a proper respect for the feelings of individuals during their life, and, after their death, for those of their relations and friends. That part of the law which attaches the penalty of dissection to the sentence of death, on a murderer alone of all other criminals, should be extended; because it is too partial, and insufficient for the purpose for which it was originally intended. If the bodies of persons hanged for murder were

numerous enough to answer the purposes of dissection, there cannot be a doubt of the propriety of making use of them, in preference to all others; but as, fortunately, they are not in sufficient number, a further supply must be procured elsewhere; and where can this supply be more properly sought for, than in the bodies of those who have been hanged for other crimes? surely if the life of a man be taken for the public good, the body might be made use of also, if required, for the same purpose. It is not, however, to the bodies of persons who are hanged, that dissection should be confined; all persons who die under sentence for criminal offences, should be given up for dissection. If the fear of such a process ever deterred one person from committing a crime, surely on such people it should be allowed to have its influence. If, as is asserted, the dissection of such persons would affect the feelings of their parents and friends, it may have a beneficial influence in the prevention of crime; but their feelings should not be allowed for a moment to preponderate against the public good; and it is very rarely that they would be brought in competition with it. Few of those who die in the hulks, or on the criminal side of gaols, have friends who care what becomes of them, either alive or dead; and when they do die under sentence, they are frequently, if not generally, buried at the public expense.

There is a peculiar reason why the bodies of

criminals should be dissected, in preference to all others. It has been gravely stated, and some faith has been given to the assertion, that, after dissection, the remains of the body may be still buried with religious rites and ceremonies. Some converts to dissection have, perhaps, been gained by this statement, than which nothing can be more unfounded; for few of the bodies given up for dissection either can, or ought to be afterwards, committed to the ground. I have no hesitation in saying, that few ever will be buried, either whole or in detail: and the person who says otherwise, being a competent judge of these matters, either wilfully deceives others, or willingly deceives himself. If anatomy could be learned by casts and drawings, there would be no need of dissection: it is not the bare enumeration of parts which constitutes a knowledge of anatomy. It is only by the strictest acquaintance with the relative situation of these parts, connected with each other by the cellular tissue, and by the removal of this tissue by dissection, that it can be acquired. It is the separation of each part in very small portions, which establishes, in the mind's eye, an intimate acquaintance with the whole structure. It is this knowledge that enables the surgeon, during the performance of an operation, to see each part, as it were, rising into view before it appears, before it is within reach of his knife. The soft parts being thus treated, what should be done

with the bones? they ought to be in the possession of the surgeon, articulated (as it is termed) or made into a skeleton, so that at all times they may be referred to. No surgeon is competent to the exercise of his profession, who has not a set of bones for this purpose; they are more important to him than his amputating knife. No serious accident can befal a patient under his charge, in which any of the great joints are implicated, that he will not be glad to refer to the skeleton. Men of the greatest ability, of the most extensive practice, often resort to this study in doubtful cases. How much more necessary then must it be for those of inferior talents and little practice, to have recourse under similar circumstances to this memorial? They ought to have in their possession, the half of a body, with the bones articulated by wires, and capable of being easily separated; a second half should be connected by the natural ligaments, dried; and they should have a third portion of another body, showing the blood-vessels and muscles, either dried or in spirits.

These preparations should be made by every surgeon; and that they have been made by the individual student himself, and are in his possession, ought, in my opinion, to be certified to the College of Surgeons by the anatomical teacher, previously to any candidate for the diploma being admitted to an examination. It should form part of his professional acquirements. I do not wish to enter

more in detail into what a student should do; but I will repeat, that if three bodies be considered sufficient to give a fair knowledge of anatomy to each student, two out of the three neither can, nor ought to be buried. The bodies of criminals should furnish these parts for reference, as far as it can be done; and thus render, after death, some service to that public which they had outraged during life. The remains of others may be buried; but it should be done privately, and without ceremony; those religious rites, which it is no less our duty than our inclination to afford, having been performed previously to the dissection taking place. I have thought it proper to state the fact, in order that there should be no deception, on any side, in discussions of this nature.

It has been said, that the dissection of a murderer always gives rise to inconvenience, from the number of visitors to see the body; and therefore murderers should not be dissected. The inference ought to be the reverse. Thirty years ago none wished to look at the body of a murderer; now, the desire for knowledge induces many to overcome their prejudices, and not only to look at a dead body, but to hunt it out in a dissecting room; and examine all the bumps on the head, and compare the resemblance with the penny wood-cuts placed at the head of his dying speech and confession. The next step would be to dissect him themselves, or at all events to assist at it; and an

able teacher might readily avail himself of this curiosity, to conciliate and gain over every one of these persons to his support. The very fact, that the increased desire for knowledge has brought indifferent persons into a dissecting room, in such numbers as to make their presence troublesome, shows that prejudices upon this point are fast subsiding.

It has been proposed to take the bodies of suicides: but this is contrary to the principle by which dissection should be regulated, unless they are destitute of friends. I do not believe one man was ever prevented from committing murder or suicide by the fear of being dissected. A person who destroys himself is rarely sane at the time; and the aberration of mind which leads to it is almost always accompanied by an incontrollable desire to commit the crime, which no reasoning can subdue. I have had many opportunities of convincing myself of this, in an incontrovertible manner. A gentleman, with whom I was intimately acquainted, suffered for a long time from a constant state of despondency, which he could not shake off: he felt (he said) an oppressive weight in the center of his head that nothing could remove, that was always present, that was never for a moment forgotten, even when in society, and when apparently cheerful. When alone, the feelings it gave rise to rendered life a burthen, and his only relief seemed to be derived from

thinking of the means of destroying himself. The contemplation of this always gave him pleasure, and he one day emphatically expressed himself to me in the following terms:—"You are my executor, and if you hear that I have made away with myself, do not be surprised; there is not a man in the world would feel himself happier at the approaching consummation of any object to which his mind was intently directed, or his desires excited, than I should at this moment, at the thought of destroying myself—it would be to me the greatest happiness: but I have still sense and religion enough to resist this propensity, and I hope God will still give me strength to resist; but I am in great fear." A few months afterwards, on waking in the morning, he felt his head was relieved from the central pressure which rendered him so miserable; he thought his death was at hand, of which this returning sense of health and comfort was the forerunner, and he awaited its approach with thankfulness and resignation. Finding it did not take place, and the feeling of renovated health continuing, he got up, dressed himself, and, to the surprise of all his friends and acquaintances, seemed a perfectly different man. From a silent melancholy person he became a very loquacious visitor; those who had known him in his youth, said it was his natural disposition, and that he was himself again. This continued for about a year, when an accidental

indiscretion, which he had the misfortune to commit, preyed upon his mind, brought on his former complaint with even redoubled force, sunk him to the lowest abyss of despair, and at last induced him, I fear, to hasten his death by his own hand. If this gentleman had died in poverty, and his body had, for want of friends, been sent to the parish workhouse to be buried, there could be no objection to its being given up for dissection; but having friends, and leaving the means for interment, the seizure of the body, under any laws, would be an act of oppression and injustice to which the public would not submit. It would be an unnecessary irritation of the feelings of the friends of the deceased, in every instance, that could not fail to have the most injurious effect, and would soon cause the abandonment of all legislative interference on the subject.

The bodies of suicides, of persons found drowned, or dead in high-ways or by-ways; in fine, the bodies of all dead persons having no relatives, or known friends to bury them, and who, on the present system, are buried at the expense of counties and parishes, should all be given up for dissection.

The only additional, proper, and reasonable source of supply of bodies for dissection, if more be required, is from among the poor who have no friends to bury them—none whose feelings would be outraged by the knowledge of their being dis-

sected. The Report of the Committee treats this matter in a proper point of view, with one exception. It is, that the bodies of certain poor only should be taken for such purposes, and not of the whole. Poverty is a misfortune which does not place the unfortunate sufferer without the pale of human kindness and feeling; it befals many, who at former periods of their lives have lived in comfort and respectability, if not in happiness. It may occur that many persons (and I have known several so situated) become chargeable to the public, and die in a workhouse, without friends to bury them, whose feelings for a period before their death would be embittered, by the thought that they were, on that account, to be delivered over for dissection. I have been told, that the giving up the bodies of criminals for dissection is an additional punishment, almost beyond the law, and after death; which I admit most readily: but, I ask in return, whether this proposed dissection of persons who die poor is not also a punishment, if dissection be a punishment, and one of a worse description, because it is for no fault but poverty—in many instances, a virtuous and honourable poverty, the result, perhaps, of unavoidable misfortunes, and of old age, but not of crime. The public good requires it, will be the answer; and I again admit the reply: but justice is to be observed, even in the demands of the public; and where is the justice in taking the body of a poor person, solely because it is the body of a

poor person ; whilst the remains of those who die under a criminal sentence, or are deprived of life, as criminals unfit to live, are to be treated with respect ? If such a measure be adopted, it will be a monstrous act of injustice to the poor of this country. Some poets, some dramatic writers of our times, have painted the crimes of robbery and murder in such glowing, such seductive colours, as to make their perpetrators almost heroes, and their deaths by the hangman merely an heroic expiation of a trifling error. It yet remains for our legislators, in their places in parliament, in the face of the nation, to inform the public : that the dead bodies of thieves and murderers are to be treated with a respect which is to be denied to those of the labourer and the artisan, guilty of no crime, but that of having died in virtuous and honourable poverty.

It is not then the bodies of all the poor who die in workhouses, that ought to be taken for dissection. A great distinction should be made among them, and every attention should be paid to the wishes of deserving individuals, whenever they are expressed on this subject. There are in all workhouses a number of persons residing temporarily, on their way to other and distant parishes, who, dying accidentally or rapidly under disease, have no knowledge of their approaching dissolution. There are other dissipated and reckless characters maintained in them for years, who care

nothing about it; and there are others again who, distressed or in misery, take refuge in these asylums without a thought on the subject. Whenever a poor person, in a workhouse, saves a sum sufficient to provide for his interment, it should be faithfully applied to that purpose. When a poor person, who has maintained a *respectable* character during life, expresses a wish on the subject to the proper authorities of the workhouse, it ought to be honestly complied with. A certain degree of discretion and power must be conceded on this point, and at first it may be abused; but after a little time, the authorities, who may have been inclined to evade the delivery of the bodies, will gradually yield, when they see the matter legalised, and acted upon generally. Perhaps, too, a greater willingness will arise from the saving resulting therefrom to the parish: and if this did not place things on a proper footing, a return made quarterly would soon prove the fact; and any two or three police magistrates, on an information being lodged, might easily make the evasion of the law clear to the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

The number of bodies said to be required for the schools of anatomy in London alone, may, at first sight, appear so great, as to raise a doubt as to the possibility of supplying them by the means indicated; but a little investigation will show, that a much smaller number will suffice. In a

memorandum given to Mr. Fowell Buxton, and by him transmitted to Mr. Peel, five years ago, I stated that seven hundred bodies, annually, would be an ample supply; and I see no reason now to alter that opinion. In the best time of Mr. Brookes, when his anatomical class was full, and subjects were easily procured, the number dissected in one year never exceeded one hundred. The fact is, students have not time to dissect more than one body in a season, the other various studies required from them rendering it impossible. They cannot in general dissect so much, and few would do more if they could find the time: they might, perhaps, have parts of more bodies, and waste them if they could be procured readily and cheaply; but they would not bestow upon them that time and labour, which is necessary to make good anatomists. The greater number of students will only take the trouble to acquire just as much knowledge as will enable them to pass an examination, and no more. The dissection of one body, which has been divided into four or five parts, each part being taken up in succession at short intervals, so as to occupy the space of sixteen months, will, with a reasonable degree of previous knowledge, and in many instances without it, make a student a very tolerable anatomist. If two seasons be allotted to this study in London, two bodies will be amply sufficient, unless it is intended that a man should be an

anatomist of the first class, when there should be no limit to his study and to his dissections. The performance of surgical operations need not interfere with the subsequent dissection of the parts; indeed, little advantage will be derived from having performed an operation on a dead body, unless the parts are dissected afterwards, in order that the student may see what he has cut, and what he ought to avoid. If subjects are too easily procured, they will not be sufficiently valued, and this kind of dissection, as well as others more minute, will be neglected. The same thing holds good as to the sum paid for them; too low will be almost as detrimental as too high a price, to minute anatomy. When the price is very high, every part is minutely and most carefully dissected: when too low, it is despised, and thrown away for the slightest cause. To maintain the respectability of the profession, education should not be in any point too cheap, and the current price of thirty years ago, when there was no scarcity, cannot be considered unreasonable at the present time.

If, by the means which I have now pointed out, a regular and sufficient supply of dead bodies, in an authorised manner, were (as I believe it would be) ensured; the advantages resulting to the public would be, the abolition of the practice of stealing dead bodies, and the extinction of the class of resurrection men. It is unnecessary to

write one line on the abolition of the practice of stealing dead bodies. When the public is satisfied that it will be suppressed by the adoption of the plans recommended (but only on their adoption), any prejudice which may remain against them will yield, if it be not entirely removed. Of two evils, the least will be chosen; at present all classes of people suffer. By the adoption of the plans recommended, only those of bad character, or without friends, could be affected; and the better part of the public are little disposed to look to that which it does not feel, and hopes never to suffer. The extinction of the class of resurrection men, and their occupation, becomes every day more necessary. Formerly, there were but two or three such persons, who made a regular trade of stealing dead bodies, and they carried it on with some degree of decency; but this has long ceased. The increasing demand for subjects, and the competition of the teachers themselves, who would each give a guinea or two more than their neighbours, to obtain a first choice, or a preference in the supply, soon induced rogues and thieves of the worst description to become resurrection men, and raised the price of the dead body to a sum incompatible with the safety of the living. The Report of the Committee is very delicate on this point, but it ought to have been more full; the legislative public should

know, that the dealing in dead bodies gives an opportunity of committing murder with impunity. The safe disposal of the body of a murdered person is the most difficult part of the crime to accomplish. The body more often leads to the discovery, and the consequent conviction and punishment of the murderers, than any thing else; but if the ruffians who commit the crime connect themselves with all, or even one of a gang of resurrection men, the body could always be disposed of with perfect safety. Has death taken place by suffocation, or has the throat been cut? They have only to say it is the body of a suicide taken from a burial-ground in the country. The servant of the teacher of anatomy (who is in general one of the same class of persons) is too happy to get it at a cheap rate to make much inquiry; and if death took place by poisoning, with few or no outward marks of violence, inquiry would not be thought of. The occupation of the resurrection man is a most fertile source of horrible villainy, and the welfare and safety of the public imperiously demand that it should be put down. There is not the slightest difficulty in doing it. Let the regular supply of bodies for dissection be duly organised under proper authorities, and no one would purchase from these persons: on the contrary, they would always be delivered up for punishment; and a residence in

the hulks at hard labour for seven years might probably offer a chance at least of retributive justice *.

In making arrangements for facilitating the study of anatomy in Great Britain, and in comparing it with the manner in which it is cultivated in other countries, and particularly in France, it must be recollected, that it is not permitted to every one on the Continent to open a school of anatomy, when and where he pleases; on the contrary, no one can teach, even in Paris, without the licence of the public authorities, and in the regularly-appointed places; and to these the bodies for dissection are brought, and duly distributed by persons nominated for the purpose. The whole is under a regular system of arrangement, which admits of little deviation from propriety, from the moment the person dies, until the body is delivered over for dissection. Public schools for dissection are not permitted in country towns, unless where

* The proof sheet containing this passage was in the press when the account of the trial and conviction of Burke, at Edinburgh, for the horrible murder of a woman, for the sole purpose of selling her body afterwards for dissection, reached London. It proves all I have said; and it is scarcely necessary to observe, that what has happened in Edinburgh may have occurred in London. My remarks have not originated without some reason, and more than one Member of Parliament can bear testimony to my having spoken more openly to them on the subject.

universities are established; they are allowed in the hospitals, but not in private establishments. In fact, the inclination for teaching rarely exists, unless under such circumstances, and it would not be encouraged if it did. I have no hesitation in saying, that nearly similar regulations are necessary for Great Britain. In London, and in cities possessing universities, and in large towns having hospitals containing one hundred patients at least, schools of anatomy ought to be recognised, after it has been ascertained that the establishments in every part are complete; but it will not be endured that such schools should be established in every town or place which has a physician or surgeon, who may think himself competent to raise such a nuisance, unless that place possesses the means of instruction in every other point. It might seem at first sight desirable to limit the number of teachers, in each large town, and to permit only one anatomical school, to be attached to the hospital (for the Governors of an hospital will always control any irregularities which may take place); but this is objectionable, because the anatomical teachers are not always hospital physicians and surgeons, and some of the latter gentlemen have objected to anatomy being taught, except in London. The excess of teachers will always cure itself, the expense of teaching, under such circumstances, being greater than the profits.

Whilst, by compliance with an old law, the Council of the College of Surgeons of London restricted the teaching of anatomy and surgery to a few hospital physicians and surgeons, and others selected by them, I always objected to the restriction until it was removed. I have since carefully watched the consequences, and I am satisfied that no harm has been done. So far from having obstructed the views of those who formed the restriction, the removal of it will be the surest means of supporting them; whilst every man feels, at the same time, that no hindrance is given to his pursuits, save that which arises from public opinion, to which he knows he must submit. In saying that elementary schools of anatomy ought to be permitted and recognised in the larger country towns, possessing hospitals capable of accommodating one hundred persons at least, I only do that which I have always done; but I do not recommend the *immediate* adoption of the measure. The new arrangements should first be tried in London, where no one knows or cares what is going on, unless he is interested in it; and should they be found to work well, they may, by degrees, be extended to the country. Two years delay, in order to perfect the system, and to reconcile the public to it in London, where it will not come so immediately under observation, may be the means of firmly establishing it; whilst a precipitate adoption of this, or of any other plan, in every quarter

at the same time, may cause objections to be raised, fatal to its success.

The schools of anatomy in Paris are, under the orders of the administration, charged with the direction of hospitals, which are all supported and regulated by the Government. In London they are all, on the contrary, under the direction of the individuals who contribute to their support. Another source, therefore, for regulating the schools of anatomy and the supply of dead bodies must be sought for in London; and it has been suggested that a director of anatomical studies, or a person under some such title, might be appointed for that purpose. The slightest consideration will suffice to show, that when bodies are to be supplied by, and to, many different people, some regulations must be adopted, and some competent person appointed to see them properly and duly executed. It appears to me, that the Council of the College of Surgeons, which has already the superintendance of the dissection of criminals, is the proper public body to superintend the arrangement, under the Secretary of State for the Home Department; and the Secretary, or other officer the College may appoint, the proper person to carry the immediate regulations into execution.

The following plan is proposed under this system, and I would recommend the supply of dead bodies for public dissection to be derived from the following sources :—

1. All persons hanged, or otherwise executed, and for all offences whatsoever.

2. All persons who die under sentence for criminal offences, whether in the hulks, gaol, penitentiary, or elsewhere.

3. All persons who die in temporary or floating hospitals, in gaol, penitentiary, or other place of detention, or prison, from whatever cause they have been placed there, and who have no friends to bury them.

4. All persons found dead, from whatever causes, in highways, canals, or otherwise, and who, having no friends to bury them, are sent to bone-houses for interment, at the expense of the parish or county.

5, *and lastly.* The poor who die in work-houses, having no friends to bury them, having expressed no wish on the subject, and having no respectable or decent relatives to express it for them, either before or after death.

It is not proposed to interfere by regulations with the bodies of those who die without friends in regularly established hospitals; it being presumed that the surgeons of those institutions will properly apply them in the instruction of the students committed to their charge. In other words, it is not intended that the public schools of anatomy shall interfere with the private or public

instruction delivered by surgeons in their own hospitals.

The means of supply being furnished, the following regulations are proposed, to ensure a fair and regular distribution, which must be enforced, in one way or other, by legal enactment. It being understood that there are no laws on the subject to repeal, save that one, or part of one, which directs murderers to be hanged until dead, "and their bodies to be given over for dissection," and for the reception of which bodies the College of Surgeons is bound, by their charter, to find a proper place, which is at present in the vicinity of Newgate.

Laws proposed to be enacted.

1. Punishing all persons actually engaged in exhumating or stealing a dead body, or of selling it without authority, and who can be proved to have been so engaged after this Sessions of Parliament. For the first offence, six months to hard labour, and to find two securities, in fifty pounds each, for future good behaviour; to be kept to hard labour until procured. For the second offence, double the punishment. Medical or other persons knowingly receiving such dead bodies, three months to the tread mill, and a fine of one hundred pounds; to be kept to hard labour until paid.

2. Rendering the practice of dissection, and the possessing of dead bodies, legal; and protecting the persons so employed, and their property, by the same laws as protect persons and property generally.

3. Directing the five sources of supply of dead bodies, as at pages 30 and 31.

4. Declaring it to be illegal to require, or to take during life, in any hospital, workhouse, or other place for the reception of sick, or poor people, securities in money or otherwise for the burial of such persons. Penalty, twenty pounds.

5. Declaring it legal, and directing all treasurers governors, trustees, or others in authority, in hospitals or other places; and all vestries, churchwardens, overseers of the poor, and others in authority in the parishes, to give over for dissection to the College of Surgeons, or persons appointed by them, the bodies of all persons who have died, under their care or charge, without the means of burying them, and who have no relatives or persons previously known to have been friends, who are willing to do it; and all other bodies in their charge which come within the meaning of classes four and five, of the means of supply indicated, pages 30 and 31.

6. Appointing the Royal College of Surgeons of London, by their secretary, or other person nominated by them, the proper authority or authorities, to whose order the bodies are to be delivered.

7. The Royal College of Surgeons to report

quarterly, to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, on every point connected with this subject.

8. The funeral service to be read over all bodies (unless forbidden by law), before delivery for dissection.

9. Legalising the sale of a dead body by the friends of the deceased, after it has been viewed in the usual manner by the parish or other authorities.

10. The Council of the Royal College of Surgeons, in making regulations for the proper distribution of the bodies placed at their disposal, to find a proper cemetery in various parish churchyards for the interment of remains after dissection; and the Council of the College to be authorised to make such charge for each body as may be considered proper; subject to the approval of the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

11. All minor regulations of arrangement and detail made by the Council of the Royal College of Surgeons, and approved by the Secretary of State for the Home Department, to be binding on the different persons concerned. Penalty, twenty pounds.

12. Every dispute which may occur, and every offence to which a penalty is attached, to be settled by information laid in the usual manner, before any three police magistrates of the division in which the offence has been committed; and whose decision shall be final.

In order to enable all parties to act with precision, and a due regard to decorum, the following minor arrangements are proposed, under the authority of the Secretray of State, to be varied from time to time, by his sanction.

The Council of the Royal College of Surgeons, having the collection and distribution of all dead bodies intended for dissection, directs,

1. An establishment of men, four or eight in number, to be ready for service every evening in the winter season from six to ten o'clock, and to proceed as directed with a shell (in a manner similar to that at present adopted by undertakers), to the spot where the body is to be found.

2. An establishment of one or two plain hearses, with two horses, a driver, and an attendant, in black (like an undertaker's party), to be ready to go to greater distances.

3. The secretary, or proper officer appointed by the college, gives an order for the delivery of the body, which will be the receipt to the person who delivers it.

4. The servant of the college who receives the body, delivers it again, according to an order received to that effect from the secretary; and the anatomist or gentleman who receives the body from him, gives an acknowledgment, signed by himself or his assistant.

In order to enable the secretary of the college to act with the necessary precision, the keepers of gaols, hulks, and penitentiaries, or other prisons, and the masters or governors of workhouses, and temporary or floating hospitals, should be directed, under certain penalties, to inform the secretary, or officer appointed by the college, when a person dies, who is by the preceding laws ordered to be given over for dissection; and it will be the duty of the secretary or other officer of the college, to signify in return at what hour the body will be sent for. Printed forms of communication to be furnished by the college, and letters (all paid by the college) to be sent within twenty-four hours.

Teachers of anatomy to transmit every Monday morning to the secretary, or proper officer of the college, a return of the number of students wishing to dissect; and of the probable number of bodies required during the week,—at the same time, a return of the number received during the past week, and the sum due for them, at the price fixed. Practitioners, not being teachers, wishing to have a body for dissection, to communicate in a similar manner, their request being submitted for the approval of the president or vice-presidents.

Under regulations something resembling the above, all the schools of anatomy may be amply supplied. No offence to public decency will in any case take place. The public will scarcely be aware of the circumstance, and the feelings of no

one will be injured whose feelings ought to be consulted. I am aware it will be said, that in Paris the bodies of the poor only who die without friends in hospitals, are taken for dissection, and why not follow the same principle in London? The answer is conclusive—they are not in sufficient number. In Paris they are taken by the authorities, according to law, and the poor have no objection to go into hospitals, nor to the bodies of their friends being dissected. They rarely think of inquiring after the body of a person who has died in an hospital. In London it is the reverse: there is neither law nor custom in its favour; and until the prejudice shall die away with time, it is proper that the supply be obtained in the least objectionable manner. When the plan has been thoroughly arranged, and found to work well in London, there will be no difficulty in extending it to the larger towns in the country.

FINIS.

Printed by T. Brettell,
Rupert Street, Haymarket, London.